





# PROCELLARIA LESSONII, *Garn.*

## White-headed Petrel.

*Procellaria Lessonii*, Garn. Ann. des Sci. Nat., tom. vii. t. 4.—Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 611.—List of Birds in Brit. Mus. Coll., part iii. p. 163.

————— *leucocephala*, Forst. Drawings, No. 98.—Gould in Ann. and Mag. of Nat. Hist., vol. xiii. p. 363.

————— *vagabunda*, Sol. MSS.

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MANY watchful hours have I spent on the decks of the vessels which conveyed me to and from Australia for the purpose of obtaining specimens and a knowledge of the habits of the various oceanic birds which are constantly to be seen, and my views and wishes were in most instances aided by the Captains with whom I sailed, but by none more willingly than by Captain McKellar of the "Parsee." Often and often was the ship surrounded by several species of the great family *Procellaridæ*, while engaged in watching the movements of which a bright speck would appear on the distant horizon, and gradually approaching nearer and nearer at length assumed the form of the White-headed Petrel, whose wing-powers are so extraordinary as far to excel those of any of its congeners; at one moment rising high in the air, at the next sweeping comet-like through the flocks flying around; never however approaching the ship sufficiently near for a successful shot, and it was equally wary in avoiding the boat with which I was frequently favoured for the purpose of securing examples of other species; but to make use of a familiar adage, "the most knowing are taken in at last:" one beautiful morning, the 20th of February 1839, during my passage from Hobart Town to Sydney in the "Potentate," Captain Gilchrist, when the sea was perfectly calm and of a glossy smoothness, this wanderer of the ocean came in sight and approached within three hundred yards of the vessel; anxious to attract him still closer so as to bring him within range, I thought of the following stratagem:—a corked bottle attached to a long line was thrown overboard and allowed to drift to the distance of sixty yards, and kept there until the bird favoured us with another visit, which, as he continued flying round in immense circles, he was likely to do every half-hour; at length his keen eye caught sight of the neck of the bottle, to which a bobbing motion was communicated by sudden jerks of the string, and down he came to examine more closely what it was that had arrested his attention; during a momentary pause the trigger was pulled, the boat lowered, and the bird was soon in my possession.

On referring to my notes, I find that I first met with this species in lat. 39° 33' S., long. 52° 2' E. I also observed it off the coasts of Van Diemen's Land, and on my return to England I frequently saw it between Sydney and New Zealand; it was again seen in lat. 40° S., long. 154° W., and a few were seen in the South Atlantic, lat. 41° S., long. 34½° W.

The wings of the White-headed Petrel are longer and more arched than those of any other species of its size and weight, and it is consequently one of the boldest and most powerful fliers of the *Procellaridæ*. During flight the dark colouring of the wing shows very conspicuously, and presents the form of a W as seen in some other species: as is the case with most birds of powerful flight, its legs are thin and delicate.

Forehead, face, all the under surface and tail white; hinder part of the head, back of the neck and upper tail-coverts grey; back greyish brown; wings blackish brown; round and before the eye a mark of black; bill and irides black; tarsi and half the toes and webs flesh-white; the tips of the toes and webs black.

The figure is of the natural size.